

July 19, 2019

A letter from alumni of East Carolina University:

As former student body leaders and proud alumni allow us to unequivocally express what the university's official statement did not: we categorically denounce the expression of racism on our campus.

We are appalled by the racist chant that occurred at the President's rally on the campus of our beloved alma mater. We are aware that East Carolina University did not endorse this rally. It was abiding by the UNC System's guidelines regarding event hosting and ensuring the expression of free speech.

As a student body, we have a proud tradition of welcoming candidates of various affiliations to share their plans and to spark healthy dialogue. But what we heard last week was not consistent with East Carolina University's values of inclusion, diversity, nor the essence of its creed.

Representative Ilhan Omar -- the target of the chant -- is a refugee of war, an immigrant to our country, a woman of color, and a duly elected member of Congress. She drew the ire of a racist tweet from the President of the United States, telling her to "go back to where she came from". This racist smear is unfortunately all too familiar for many people of color. Last week, supporters of Donald Trump doubled down on this racist trope and chanted "send her back."

"Send her back" is not inclusive.

"Send her back" is not American.

"Send her back" is not East Carolina University.

If we should "go back" to anything, let it be to a time where the promise etched on the base of Lady Liberty still rang true: "give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." We are a nation of immigrants, and it is only out of many that we are one.

As alumni, we are devoted to our university and are committed to it being seen in a positive light. To all those who were offended by that horrid display of vitriol -- especially people of color and immigrants of all religions -- know that as a university, this is not who we are. This is not how we are. The East Carolina University that we know is an institution that is inclusive and welcoming. At ECU, "y'all means all".

Silence by anyone in the face of blatant bigotry and racism is complicity. So fellow Pirates, University administration, and all citizens for that matter, continue standing up and speaking out against hate in all forms.

To conclude with the words of our fight song stating, "loyal and bold", the only chant we want echoing throughout our campus is "PURPLE and GOLD".

Love and praise,

Proud Pirate alumni.

Authored by: Tremayne B. Smith – *Student Body President, ECU Board of Trustees 2010-2011*

Organized by: Melissa Hege Lopez – *Recipient, CREED Award for Responsibility 2009*
Walter Burks – *Class President, 2009-2010*
Heather Burks – *EC Scholar & Business Senator, 2009*

Signed by: More than 200 East Carolina University alumni